

EXPLOITS OF THE 30TH CRACK DIVISION BROKE THE HINDENBURG LINE AND THE BACKBONE OF GERMAN RESISTENCE

By Fred A. Olds

One of the numerous "treasures" in the North Carolina Hall of History is the story of the operations of the Thirtieth ("Old Hickory") Division of the United States army in France and Belgium, for it fought in both and made a record which will stand as long as men have memories and admire courage and devotion.

The story is all the work of the pen and the typewriter and it is a gift from Bryce Little of the 30th, through Secretary of State Grimes. On the cover, in color, is the emblem of the 30th, three letters "X", in black on a field of maroon, and these words: "Belgium—Ypres, Vooremezelle; the Hindenburg Line—Bellicourt, Noury, Fremont, Brancourt, Busigny, Escaufourt, Vaux Audequy." Inside are illustrations, in color, one showing the Kaiser getting a big "jolt" by the 30th, with the title "It happened on the Hindenburg Line." F. H. Simonds, the greatest military writer of the war, is quoted: "What we have had is a military decision of the war. That decision was had in the Battle of the Hindenburg Line," and Lloyd George is also quoted, saying, "The smashing of this vast defensive system, claimed by the enemy to be impregnable, is a feat of which we are justly proud."

Next comes the roster of the officers of the division, Maj. Gen. E. M. Lewis being its commander, Col. John H. Herr chief of staff (the latter antographing (sic) this story as "official"), Then follows the roster of officers of the 59th brigade, Brig. Gen. Lawrence D. Tyson (born in North Carolina) composed of the 117th and 118th infantry (Tennesseans); the 60th brigade, Brig. Gen. Samuel L. Faison, composed of the 119th and 120th infantry. The 119th is commanded by Col. John van Bokkelen Metts (Wilmington), Lt. Col. B. B. McCrosky, Majors Graham K. Hobbs, John H. Manning, H. C. Bays, each commanding a battalion. The 120th is commanded by Col. Sidney W. Minor (Durham), Lt. Col. Don R. Scott, Majors James A. Leonard, Hilliard Comstock, James W. Jenkins, each commanding a battalion. The 115th machine-gun Battalion, Maj. Whitworth W. Pierce commanding. The 105th Engineers, Col. Joseph Hyde Pratt (of Chapel Hill) commanding; . Lt. Col. Perrin C. Cothran, Majors George L. Lyster and George W. Gillette commanding battalions.

The 30th is a distinctively American division, for over 95 per cent of its officers and enlisted men are of American-born parents. It is composed of National Guard Troops of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee, augmented by many thousands of selective draft troops from Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. It is named for Andrew Jackson, soldier and resident, whose "pet name" was Old Hickory", and who was closely identified with the history of the states which furnished most of the personnel.

This division landed at Calais, France, May 24, 1918, and was first billeted (that is quartered or encamped) in the Eperlecques Training Area, and there its officers re-connoitered the German line south of Cassel and plans were made to occupy it, if necessary, by forced marches. The division was next transferred to the 11th British corps, of the British Second Army, in the Ypres (Belgium) sector, so as to be in close support in case of the expected German offensive. It was the first American division to enter Belgium, into which it marched July 4, took post at Watou, to closely support the 33rd and 49th British divisions, and completed the building of a strong defense system in rear of these two divisions, doing an immense amount of trench and wire construction. It was under orders to hold this system in case the two British divisions had to fall back. It was trained with the latter divisions; first as individuals, then by platoons and last by entire battalions, and August 22 it took over all the sector of front which the 30th British division had occupied, to rest the latter. The 60th brigade, Gen. Faison, was in the front line, with the 59th, Gen. Tyson, in support. This was known as the "canal sector"; it was 2,400 yards long, from the suburbs of Ypres to Vooremezelle.